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WOOD-CARVING
ACCORDING TO THE
JAPANESE METHOD

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A COURSE OF INSTRUCTION IN WOOD-CARVING ACCORDING TO THE JAPANESE METHOD

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JAPANESE WOOD-CARVING.

IN Japan the art of wood-carving has probably been carried to a greater degree of perfection than in any other country in the world. Coincident with the progress of civilisation and the development of the arts in the West, the sculpture of marble and stone assumed an importance proportionate to the extent to which those materials were employed in architecture.

The physical characteristics of Japan—the prevalence of earthquakes and earth-tremors—which prohibited the use of heavy materials for building purposes, have, at the same time, ordained the employment of wood as best adapted to resist these seismic disturbances. Cottage and palace, barn and temple are, therefore, mainly constructed of it, and wooden temples exist in Japan, built as far back as the ninth and tenth centuries of our era, which are still in sound condition, and exhibit in a far less degree the ravages of time than do the stone buildings of the same age in Europe. Whether wood or stone be the more “noble” material does not here concern us; but that wood has been rightly selected for use in Japan there can be no manner of doubt; and the result has been to give [to] the wood-carver a position in the arts equivalent to that enjoyed by the mason in the

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West. As much respect is probably paid in Japan to the memory of the eminent wood-carver "Hidari" Jingoro, whose works may still be admired and wondered at in many important buildings in that country, as is bestowed in Europe upon the achievements of Pheidias, albeit that the essential characters of the great arts of Japan and Greece are based upon widely differing Philosophies.

European acquaintance with Japanese carving is chiefly confined to the small ornamental adjuncts to pouch or dress known as *Netsuke*, to which so many connoisseurs of the curious and beautiful have wisely turned their attention in recent years. It is easy to imagine the delight with which Grinling Gibbons would have gazed at some of these marvellous imitations of fungi, rats, and frogs, carved by his own contemporaries in far-off Japan. But even in the common articles of trade which are produced to-day in that country, the beauty and delicacy of handwork and the masterful use of the chisel are at times astonishing. It is not, however, until a visit to Japan reveals the works of the great masters *in situ* that it is possible to realise fully the perfection to which the wood-carver's art has there attained. The massive gateways, the heavy roof bracketings, the panels and friezes on a grand scale, are carved with a force of sculptural

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expression never exceeded in artistic power by any chiseller of stone in any age. These boldly conceived wood sculptures are evidence that the material, instead of detracting from the artistic value of the work, was in itself an advantage to the worker, who could obtain effects from it with far greater freedom than would be possible from stone. The delight felt in contemplating them is, in fact, exactly akin to the pleasure aroused by the direct touches of a great painter which express so much with such little apparent effort.

It is impossible to examine thoroughly much of the wood-carving of the Japanese without marveling at the remarkable facility with which it appears to have been executed. And this is noticeable not only in the work of the great carvers, but also in the ornamentation of the commonest objects. Even the carved decoration on a penny paper-knife, although perhaps of the slightest, almost invariably bears evidence of having been executed by an adept in his craft—one who could do better work if called upon.

From whence comes this facility? Is it due to some intuitive power, denied to us in the West, which enables the Japanese to draw and to carve with the same ease that we learn to walk? Or does it result from some more perfect method of

JAPANESE WOOD-CARVING

education than we are accustomed to? The first suggestion may be rejected as improbable? What are the facts about the second?

While upon a visit to Japan a few years ago, the writer had the good fortune to visit the University College in Tokio, where he was shown a series of practical object-lessons prepared by the master of the School of Wood-carving for the use of his pupils. Block after block was attentively inspected, and as the lessons progressed, one following in a natural sequence upon the preceding one, a system was revealed so practical, so full of careful thought, so perfect, as to impress him more than ever with the thoroughness of the people—a thoroughness shown alike in all they attempt, whether in the arts of peace or of war. The opportunities for learning their craft afforded to the old masters of wood-carving were, in all probability, very different from those now at the disposal of young Japan. In the old times the crafts were learnt in the workshop, very much in the European manner, and it is possible that each master had his own individual way of instructing his apprentices. Of these methods we know little, and, moreover, we shall probably never be made fully acquainted with them. But of the system now in use at the Tokio University it is the good fortune of the writer to be able to give

JAPANESE WOOD-CARVING

some detailed particulars. The system is one of such general value that it might be studied to advantage by all who are desirous of learning this delightful craft, as well as by those who have already made partial progress towards mastering its intricacies. It might be described as the "Ollendorff of



"HIDARI" JINGORO AT WORK

Wood-carving." As taught in Japan, the full course of lessons is supposed to occupy the student three years. The third year is, however, devoted to a series of advanced studies consisting of finished works, which have not the same technical interest to Europeans as the preliminary lessons.

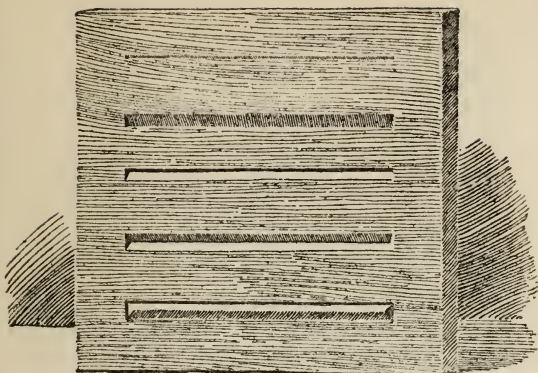
The illustrations of the lessons which here follow have been made by Mr. H. P. Clifford from the

JAPANESE WOOD-CARVING

actual carvings prepared in Tokio, and now in the possession of the writer. These carvings are upon pieces of a soft wood, of the uniform size of six inches square by about five-eighths of an inch thick.

SET I

THE lessons comprised in this set are naturally of a preliminary nature. The student is first required to learn how to carve a straight line—a by no means easy task. In order to guide the hand in cutting, however, lines are ruled upon the block. It is especially interesting to notice the fact that each lesson is based upon the preceding ones, and that the beautiful patterns of Lesson 6 are merely a combination of the lines shown in Lessons 1 to 5.



SET I

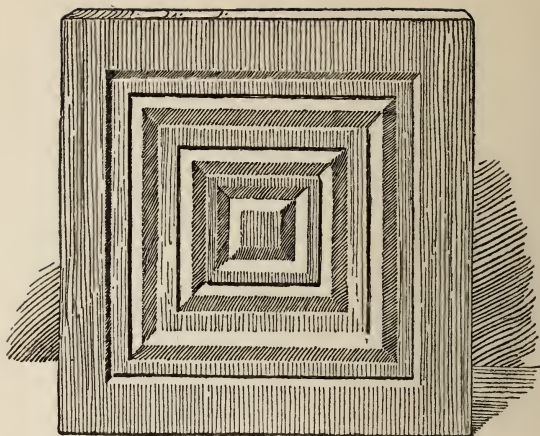
LESSON I

OSEN.—Horizontal lines. Cut with the grain of the wood, and consisting of combinations of the simplest forms of incised work.

SET I

LESSON 2

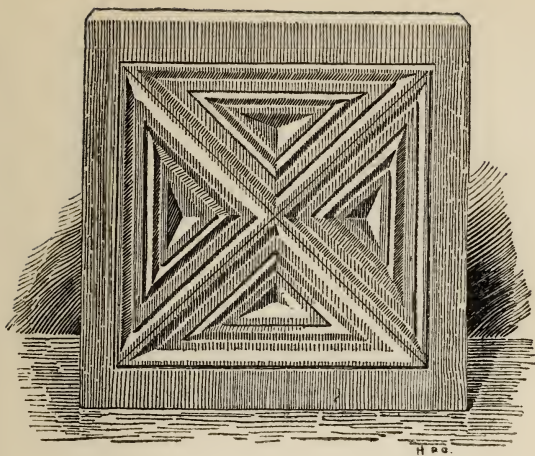
JUSEN.—Vertical lines. Cut against the grain of the wood, but otherwise corresponding precisely with the lines of Lesson 1.



SET I

LESSON 3

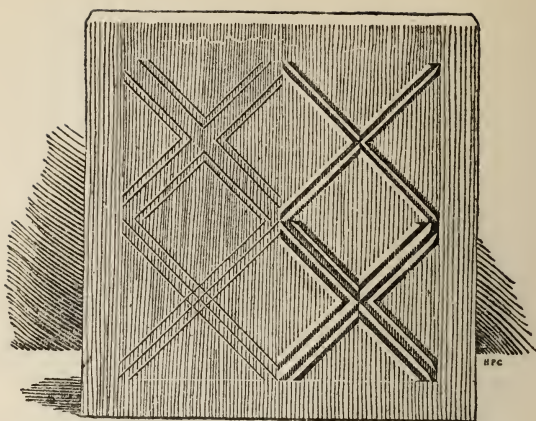
ORI MAWASHI.—From *Ori*, to fold, and *Mawashi*, to turn. This lesson is a combination of the two preceding ones.



SET I

LESSON 4

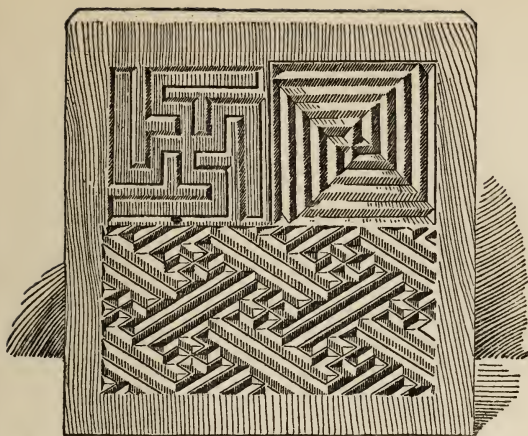
ORI KOMI.—From *Ori*, to fold, and *Komi*, to put into. A study of oblique lines and triangles.



SET I

LESSON 5

TASUKI.—Intersecting lines. A simple but useful lesson in the management of crossed lines.



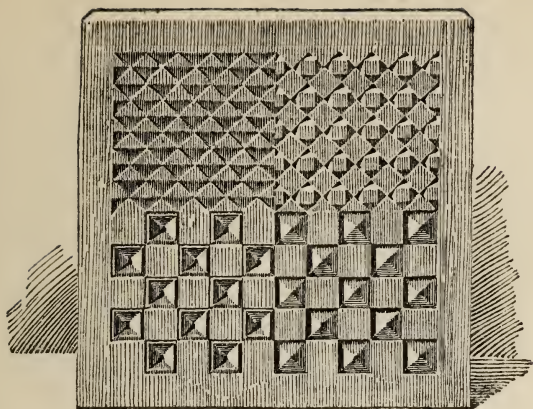
SET I

H.P.C.
LESSON 6

FRET AND KEY PATTERNS.—In this lesson, a combination of all the preceding ones, the patterns become somewhat more elaborate.

SET II

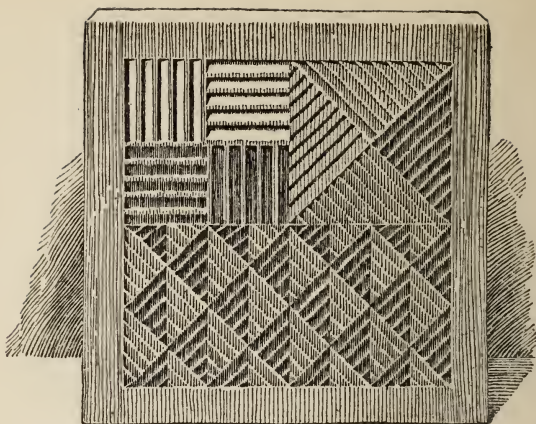
THE delightful diaper patterns given in this set will be found extremely useful even to the skilled worker. The student is gradually led from straight lines and incisions of a simple character to a slight modelling of the surface. The advance from stage to stage is so gradual as to be scarcely perceptible, but steady progress is nevertheless being made, and a close study of the characteristics of each lesson will show with what skill the designs have been selected.



SET II

H.R.C.
LESSON I

KIRIKOMI SANKAKU. — Triangular incisions. In this the line-work observable throughout the lessons of Set I are absent.

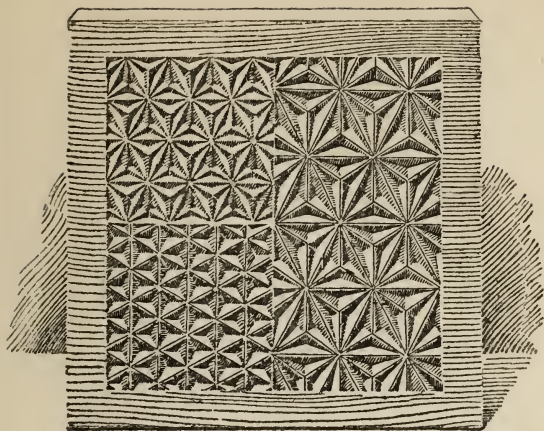


H. R. C.

SET II

LESSON 2

OIKAKE SANKAKU. — Overlapping triangular patterns. A return to line work, showing some new developments in fine edge-cutting.

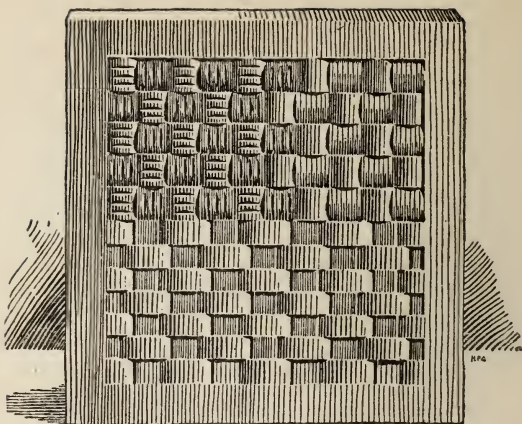


M P C.

SET II

LESSON 3

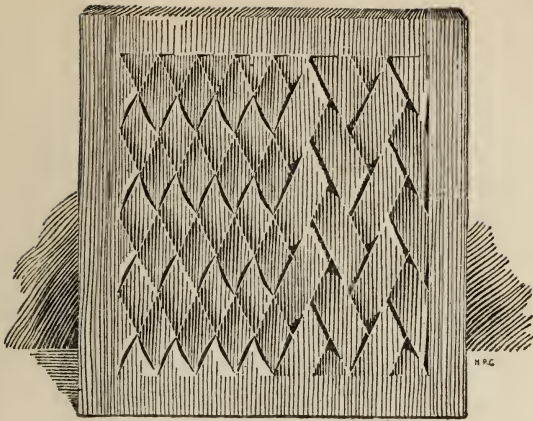
ASANOKA.—Hemp-leaf pattern. Designs in which the incised work and fine edge-cutting of the last two lessons are incorporated.



SET II

LESSON 4

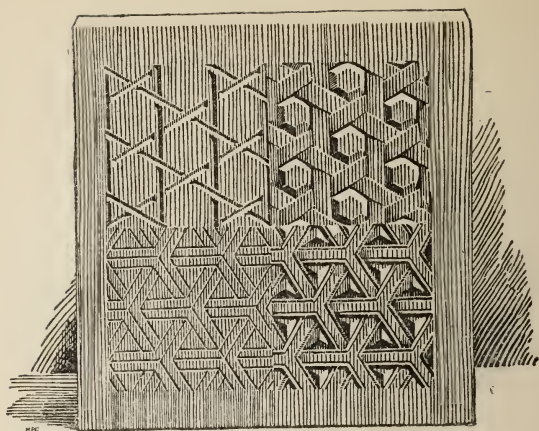
ISHIDATAMI.—Overlapping square patterns.
A slight modelling or rounding of the face
occurs here for the first time.



SET II

LESSON 5

HIGAKI. — Interlacing patterns. A similar lesson to the last, but dealing with oblique work.



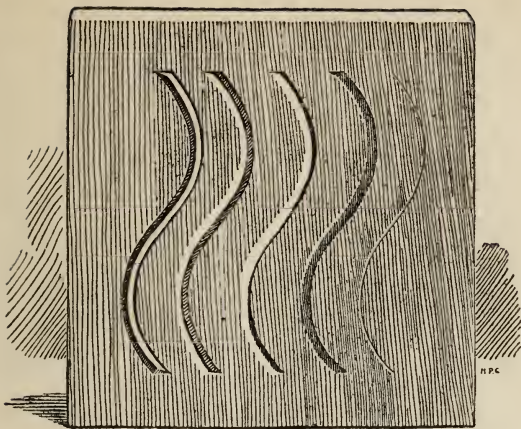
SET II

LESSON 6

KAGOME.—Bamboo basket patterns. A more elaborate development of the preceding lesson.

SET III

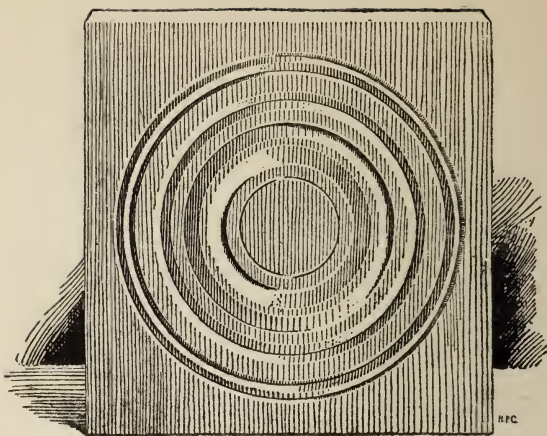
THE first lessons in curved forms will now be set forth. The details of each pattern and almost every line have their separate value as exercises. Thus, in the first two lessons the curves are so arranged as to give the maximum amount of instruction in the simplest manner. It is intended that the hand, in following them, should be trained to make curves in all directions with equal facility. A thorough mastering of these early lessons will be found by the student to be of immense value to him when he commences to essay advanced work. In the later lessons of this Set the first exercises for surface modelling on curved forms are given.



SET III

LESSON I

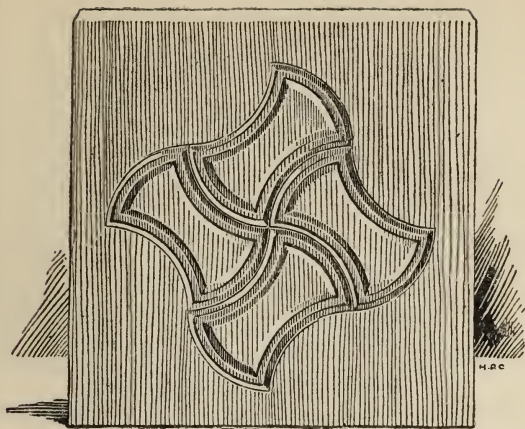
JUKYOKUSEN.—Vertical curves. A precisely similar lesson to the first in Set I, save that the lines are curved instead of straight.



SET III

LESSON 2

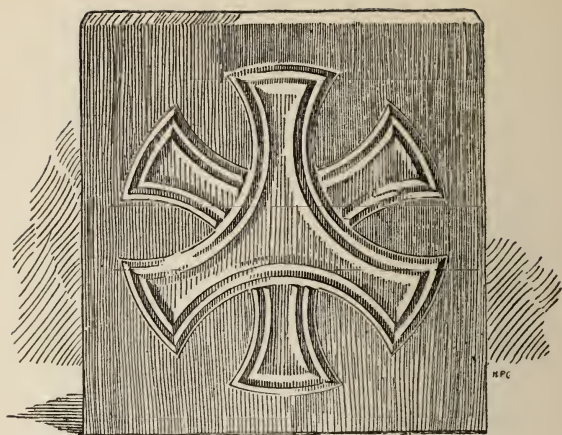
ENKEI. — A circle. As in the preceding lesson, faint lines are first traced by the compass as a guide to the carver.



SET III

LESSON 3

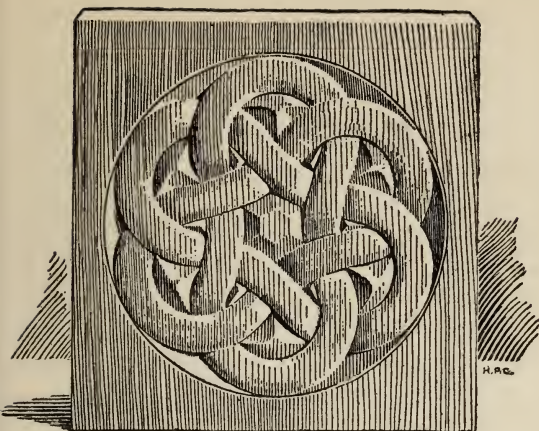
TORI-TASUKI.—A curved pattern suggestive of bird form. Simple incisions following well-defined geometric forms.



SET III

LESSON 4

KUMI-KIKO. — Tortoise-shell pattern. The central portions of this design are slightly rounded or modelled.



SET III

LESSON 5

KUMI-HIMO.—Braid pattern. Rounded interlacing forms with triangular incisions. A combination of preceding lessons.

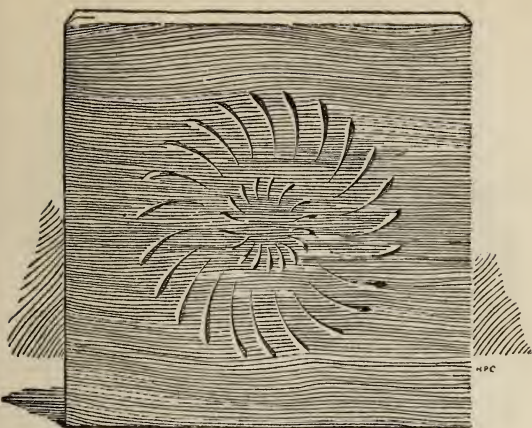
SET IV

A NOTABLE stage of instruction is reached in the lessons comprised in this Set. Hitherto the lines and curves have been confined to those of mathematical rigidity. No latitude has been given to the play of the hand. The necessity for the student to cultivate freehand is nowhere found to be more important than in wood-carving. There is a particular charm about the perfect handling of the chisel which can scarcely be overrated. Freedom of movement, together with power of expression, are of the highest importance. Nothing denotes the master of the craft more than the manner in which every cut is executed. Weakness, hesitancy, want of complete sympathy between head and hand, soon make themselves felt upon the work produced. The Japanese carvers are renowned for the wonderful control they exercise over the chisel ; and there can be little doubt that this is due in a large measure to the great importance attached by them to freehand work in all its phases.

The progress of the freehand lessons in Set IV should be very carefully examined. Lesson 1 begins with deep triangular incisions, which are carved forwards in a graceful curve until they terminate in fine hair-like lines. Any hesitation or "niggling"

JAPANESE WOOD-CARVING

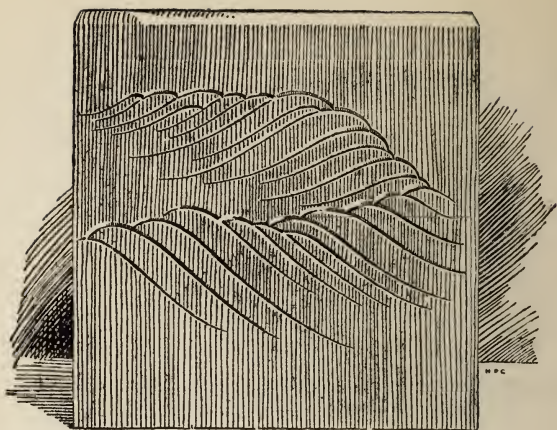
on the part of the carver would be fatal to the proper production of such lines, and, indeed, close attention and considerable practice will be found necessary in order to execute them satisfactorily. Lesson 2 is a further example of freehand work in which the experience gained in Lesson 1 will be found of the greatest use. Lesson 3 is scarcely more than a variety of the preceding ones, but is remarkable for the fact that it introduces the student for the first time to the study of plant form. Lesson 4 is a delightful freehand study. The easy sweeps of the tool and the delicacy and force of the incisions are admirably rendered. Lesson 5 teaches a still bolder form of cutting combined with a greater degree of surface modelling, and is a useful introduction to the final lesson, No. 6, of this Set. The *Tómôye*, upon which the last lesson is based, is a species of badge of circular form usually containing a combination of two or three comma-like patterns, and is often to be met with in Japanese ornamentation. In this case we have the crest of a wave rendered conventionally after the fashion of the badge. Its chief interest to the carver lies in the fine sweeping lines of the pattern and the careful work required in the surface modelling.



SET IV

LESSON I

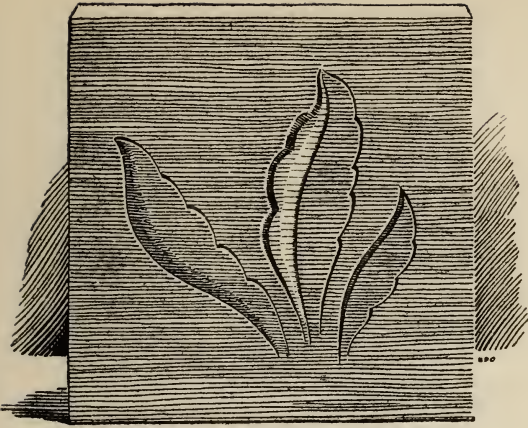
SEN-MO.—From *Sen*, to turn round, and *Mo*, hair. Curved lines of varying depth, turning both to right and left.



SET IV

LESSON 2

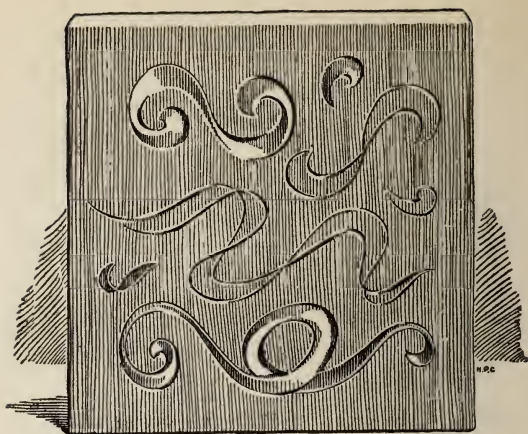
NAMI.—Waves. Curved strokes to right and left. The varied depth of the cutting is to teach a free handling of the chisel.



SET IV

LESSON 3

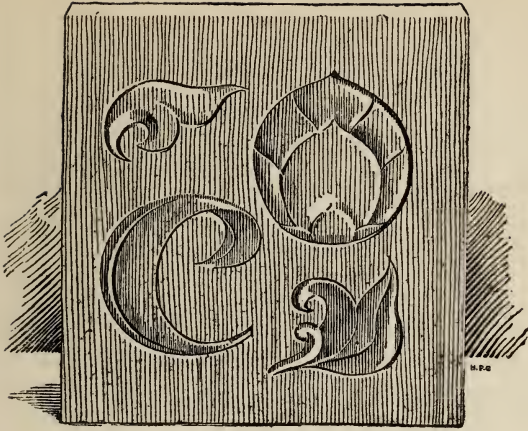
KIRI-NO-HA.—Leaves of the Kiri. One side of the leaf on the left hand is rounded on the outer edge.



SET IV

LESSON 4

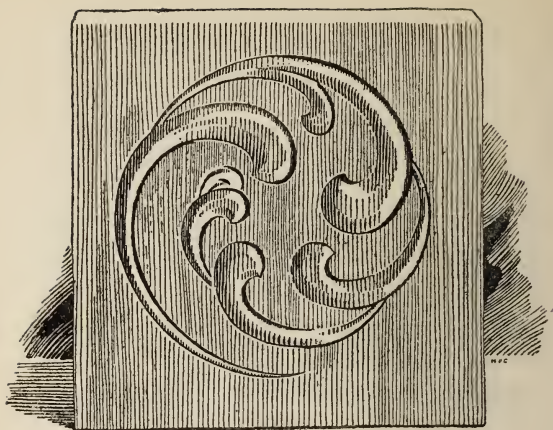
CHIRI-NUNO. — Scarf forms or “scattered fabrics.” A lesson in both shallow and deep cutting of free curved forms.



SET IV

LESSON 5

KWAYO.—Flower and leaf forms. Based on the preceding lesson, with the addition of a more elaborate modelling of the surface.



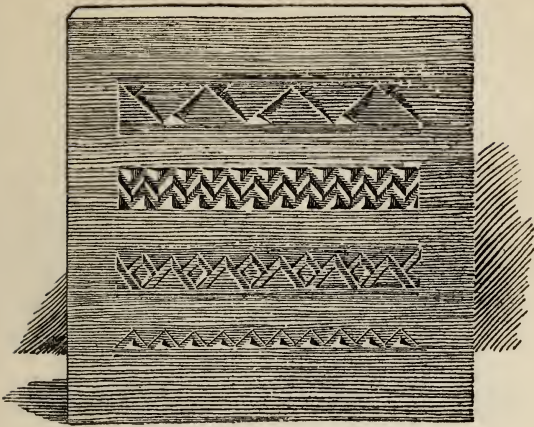
SET IV

LESSON 6

NAMI TOMOYE.—The cresting of a wave arranged in the *Tômye* forms. The cutting and modelling are based on the preceding lessons.

SET V

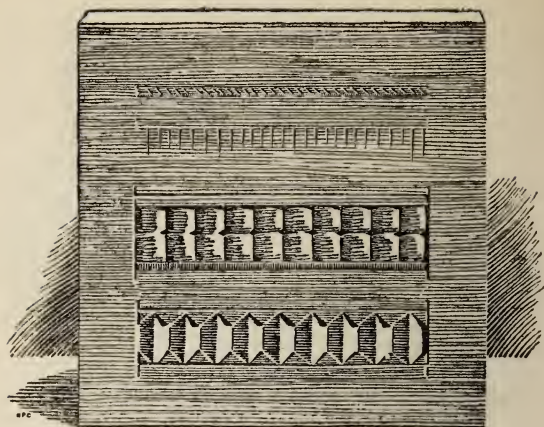
WITH this Set the question of "Subjects" is first approached. The four lessons consist of "Border" patterns suggested in some instances by the beautiful designs to be found in Japanese braids. At first sight they appear to be almost a repetition of studies previously given ; but when carefully examined they will be found to present difficulties of cutting not previously experienced. In the course of the four lessons the student will find that he is required to practice every form and manner of cutting hitherto learnt by him.



SET V

LESSON I

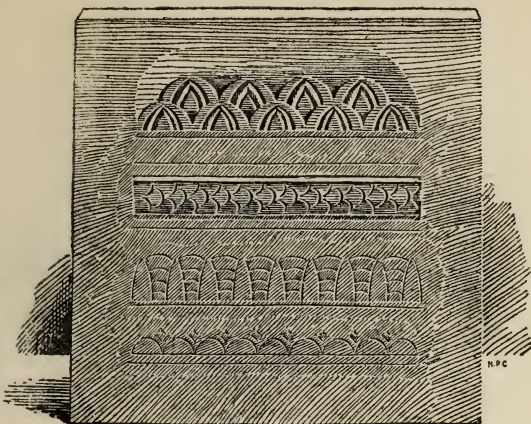
CHOKUSEN FUCHI Moyo.—Straight border patterns. Useful patterns of a comparatively simple character.



SET V

LESSON 2

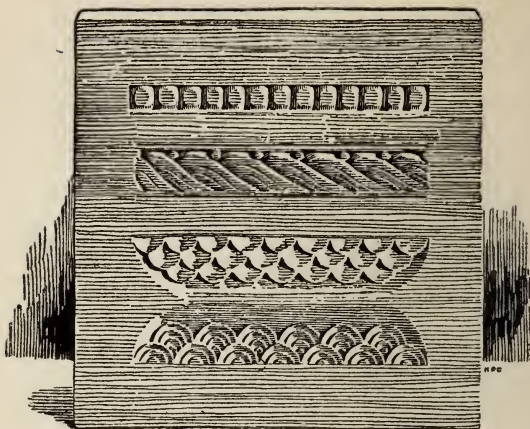
KYOKUSEN FUCHI MOYO.—Border patterns.
The principal ornaments are derived from
Japanese braid-work.



SET V

LESSON 3

KYOKUSEN FUCHI.—Curved border patterns. Strength of handwork in the upper pattern is contrasted with the delicacy of the lower ones.

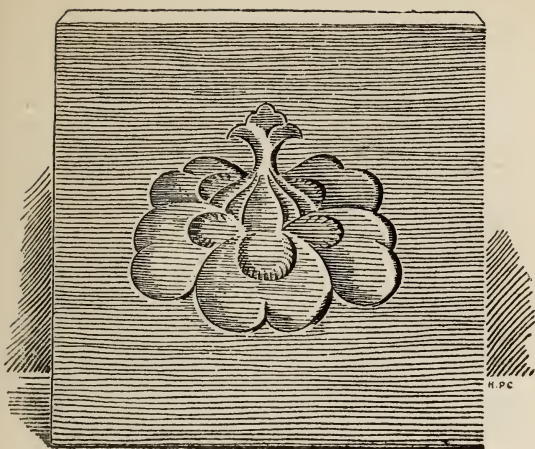


SET V

LESSON 4

KYOKUSEN OBI MOYO.—Curved girdle patterns. Full of delicate cutting and careful surface modelling.

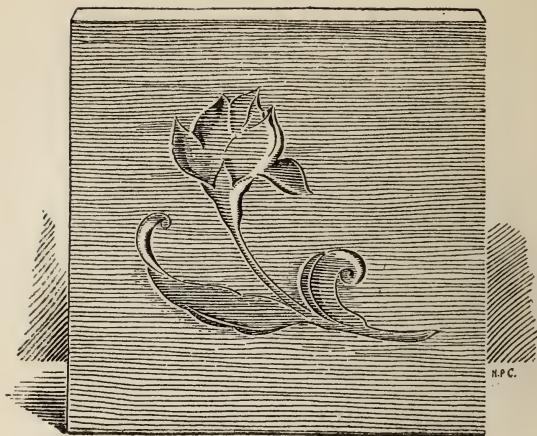
THESE exercises on "Plant Form" are of especial value, as they introduce the student more fully to freehand work, and the splendid treatment of stems, leaves and flowers in which the Japanese are so singularly successful. Breadth and simplicity are the distinguishing characteristics of these lessons, and the treatment should be thoroughly mastered before the student proceeds to later studies.



SET VI

LESSON I

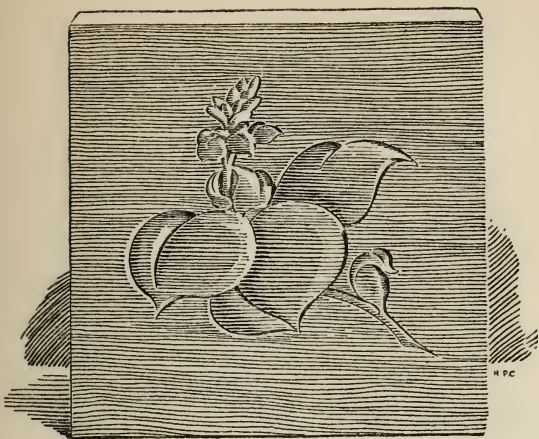
HANA—Flower pattern. An ornament of floral-like character with simple surface modelling.



SET VI

LESSON 2

NOGUSA. — A plant. A more naturalistic rendering of floral form with simple but pleasant modelling.



SET VI

LESSON 3

MIZU KUSA.—Aquatic plant. A simple form of leaf and flower presenting but few difficulties to the carver.



SET VI

LESSON 4

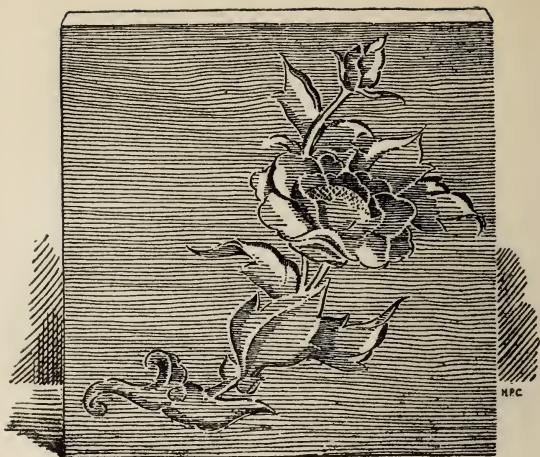
YURI MOYO.—The lily form. A slightly more elaborate study, the wavy outline requiring careful work.



SET VI

LESSON 5

KWAJITSU.—The fruit form. A free decorative rendering of a curious and unfamiliar form.



SET VI

LESSON 6

MOKUKWA.—The flower of a tree. Apparently representing a spray of the Tree Peony. The treatment of flower and leaves is excellent.

SET VII

THE whole purpose of the two Sets of lessons which now follow is to familiarise the student more and more with the use of his tools, and to show him a suitable treatment of the varying forms and details of plant-life. No very difficult tasks are imposed as the technique of the work is defined within the lines of preceding lessons. High-relief carving is, for the present, not attempted; for there is so much to be learnt about the proper presentment of the varied objects of Nature in the low-relief cutting hitherto practised—so much that is beautiful, so much that will be found of the greatest value in the serious work of the future—that the student is quite rightly kept free from any new technical complications during the weeks of study which the present lessons represent.

And the tasks which are now set before him are certainly delightful ones. These lessons of fruit and flowers are exquisite examples of the best of their kind, full of tender appreciation of the subtle forms of bud or of petal, of the rugosities of the stem or the veining of the leaf. It is in the delicate and almost loving regard for the finest traits of Nature that the Japanese craftsmen excel their *confrères* in the West, and it is, assuredly, in the more

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careful study of every detail of Nature that the quality of our own art may be vastly improved.

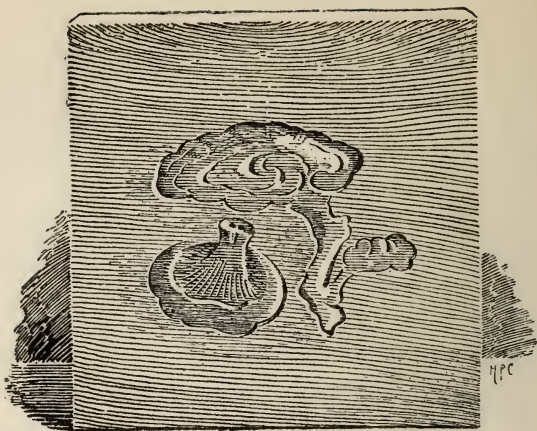
What more charming examples of a simple treatment of fruit and leaves could be desired than Lessons 3 and 4 of Set VII? The character of the stems, the varied pose of the leaves, the growth and form of the fruit, are recorded so simply, and yet with such fine appreciation of the poetry which surrounds them in Nature, that they are worthy of the closest study. The lotus-leaf in Lesson 5 of Set VII is essentially a study of light and shade. The characteristics of the leaf are shown by the shadows cast by the varying depth of the cutting. It is, in short, an example of impressionism in wood-carving, and is replete with pleasant suggestion.



SET VII

LESSON I

TAMA.—The Sacred Jewel. A familiar object to the student of old Japanese art-works.



SET VII

LESSON 2

TAKE.—Fungi. Semi-naturalistically treated, midway in conventionality between the last lesson and the next one.



SET VII

LESSON 3

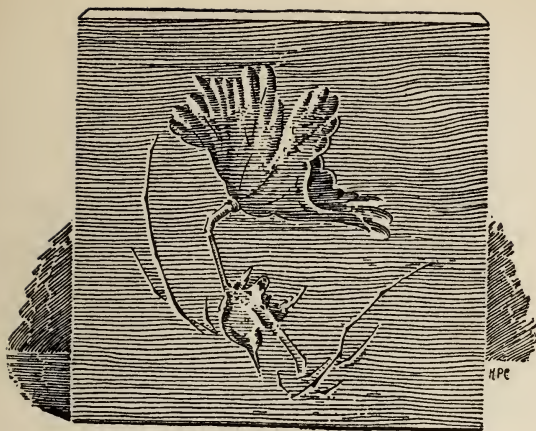
KWABUTSU.—Fruit. A charming lesson in freehand cutting and low-relief modelling, the fruit being simply but excellently rendered.



SET VII

LESSON 4

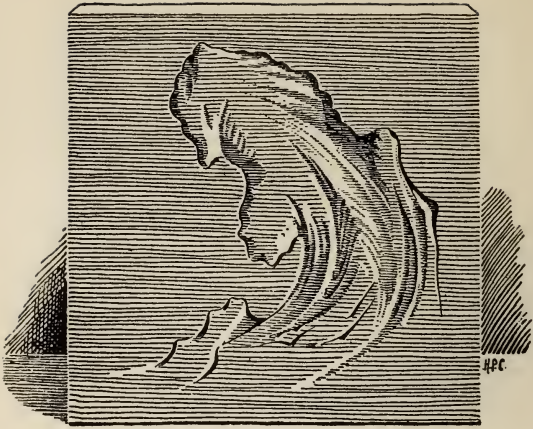
BUDØ.—Grapes. Another delightful lesson for the more advanced student. Note especially the freedom of the design.



SET VII

LESSON 5

HASU and KAWASEMI.—The lotus and the kingfisher. The lotus leaf, it will be observed, is treated in the impressionist manner.



SET VII

LESSON 6

IWA.—Rock form. The peculiar convention observed by the Japanese in the treatment of rocks is here exemplified.

SET VIII

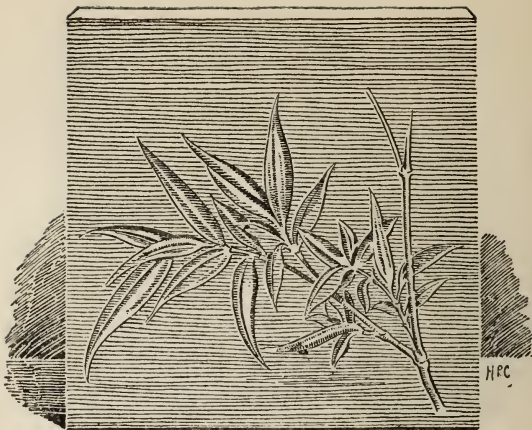
IN the whole of the lessons in this Set the characteristics of growth natural to each plant are most carefully observed. Naturalism is treated in a purely decorative manner without loss of the specific charm with which Nature has endowed each subject.



SET VIII

LESSON I

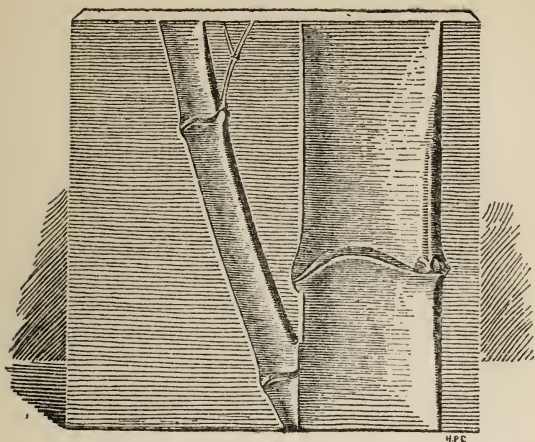
RAN.—An orchid. The ribbon-like leaves of this class of plant have been cleverly treated to avoid monotony.



SET VIII

LESSON 2

SASA.—A spray of bamboo. A very favourite subject of Japanese carvers, and one that is open to great variety of treatment.



H.P.C.

SET VIII

LESSON 3

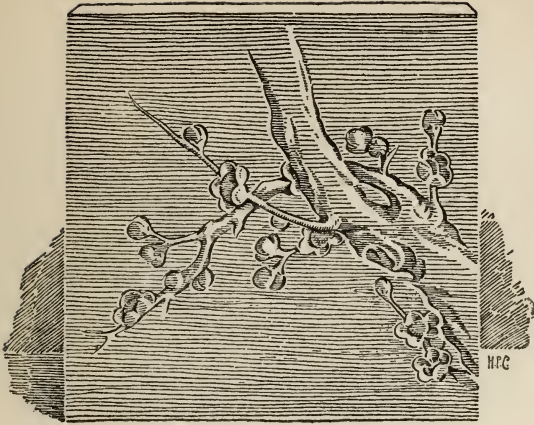
TAKE—Bamboo stem. A bold and beautiful treatment of an interesting subject. Excellent in its simplicity.



SET VIII

LESSON 4

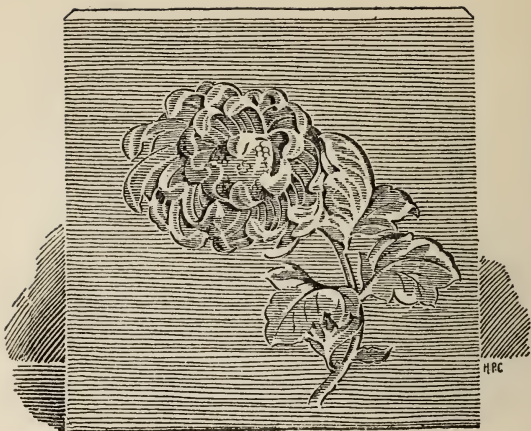
KIKU NO HA.—Leaves of the chrysanthemum.
The cutting of the under side of one of the
leaves is especially worthy of attention.



SET VIII

LESSON 5

UME.—The plum tree. The rugged character of the trunk acts as an excellent foil to the delicate modelling of the flowers and buds.



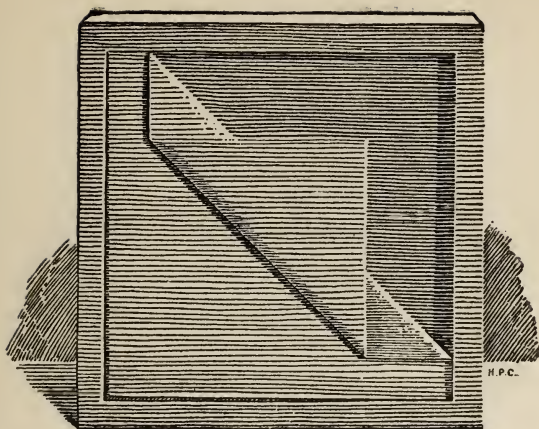
SET VIII

LESSON 6

KIKU NO HANA.—The chrysanthemum flower.
A charming variety in the curves of the petals
and pose of the leaves.

SET IX

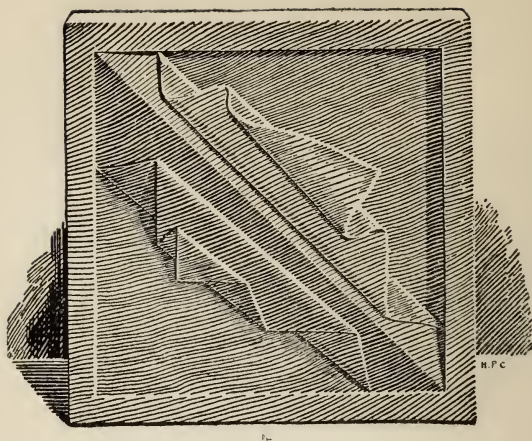
THE lessons comprised in this Set may be regarded as an introduction to carving in relief. The deep recessed work of the earlier studies presents to the student some fresh problems, the mastering of which is of the highest importance. Due comparison of each of the lessons will show how thoroughly practical they are, and how carefully the student is led by them through the maze of difficulties which beset him in the progress of his studies.



SET IX

LESSON I

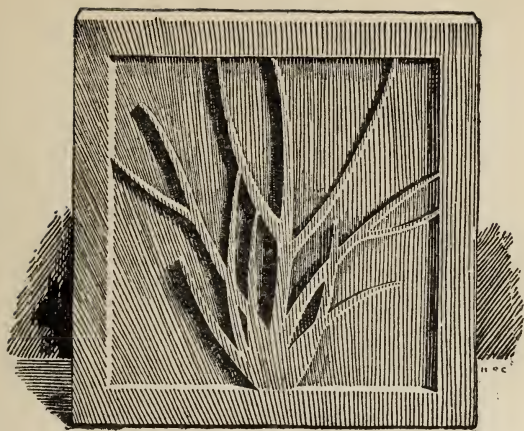
ORI DASHI.—Outside folding. The upper right-hand portion is sunk to the depth of $\frac{3}{16}$ ths of an inch.



SET IX

LESSON 2

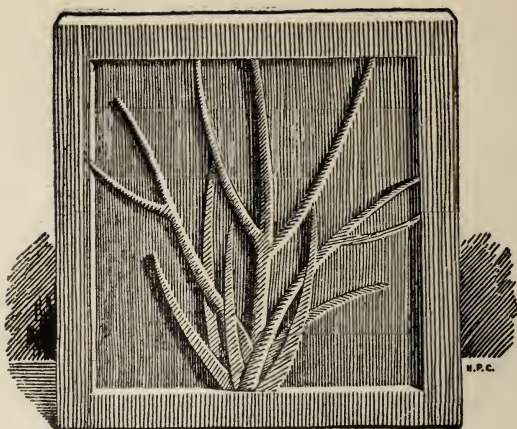
ORI KOMI.—Inside folding. The ground is sunk as in the last lesson, the folds being delicately modelled.



SET IX

LESSON 3

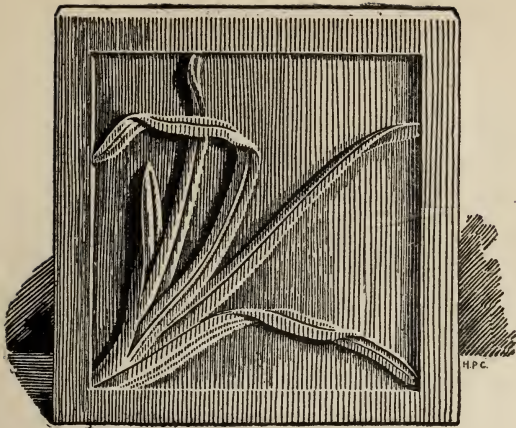
SHIKAKU.—Branch form. Deeply cut, the angles being very sharp and finished with great precision and care.



SET IX

LESSON 4

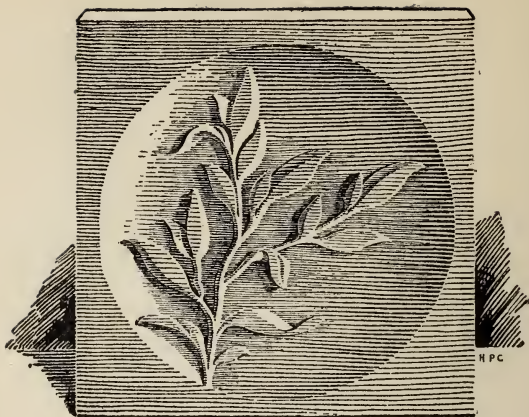
The same as the last, but with the branches interlacing at various depths and the edges rounded off.



SET IX

LESSON 5

KUMIHA.—Leaf form. A further development of the last lesson, the leaves being delicately modelled.



SET IX

LESSON 6

SHIYŌ.—Leaves and branches. The ground being deeply sunk necessitates especial care in the management of the thin stems.

SET X

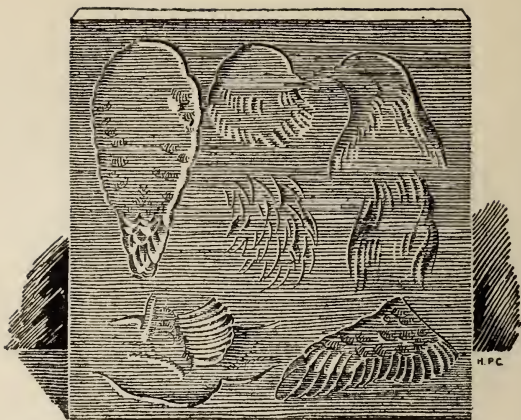
THIS is a singularly beautiful and valuable series of lessons. The technique peculiar to Japanese Carving is of especial interest when applied to the representation of birds. Probably no other method of carving could so simply and yet so thoroughly express the characteristics of wing and tail feathers as shown in Lessons 2 and 3 ; while in the final lesson (No. 6) there is exhibited a simplicity of method and restraint in handling, combined with such perfect expression and suggestion of reality, that one is forced to admit that art is here carried to a far higher level than in the laboured and over-elaborated examples of similar subjects in European work.



SET X

LESSON I

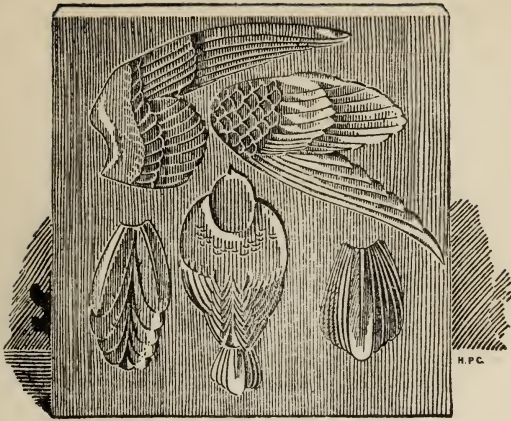
CHŌKAKU.—Bird form. Outline studies of birds flying and at rest. Cut with great freedom.



SET X

LESSON 2

KEKUMI.—Feather form. Interesting as examples of the varied methods of suggesting feathers.



SET X

LESSON 3

CHŌKAKU.—Bird form. A study of wing and tail feathers. Cut with great precision and delicacy.



SET X

LESSON 4

TOBUTORI, or HICHŌ.—Flying birds. The wings are cut with great sharpness, the bodies being delicately rounded.



SET X

LESSON 5

SHIKU CHŪ.—Birds on tree. The design is here shown in relief, the groundwork being cut away.



SET X

LESSON 6

TORI.—Bird. Shown in relief, the ground-work being cut away. The feet are exquisitely represented in the original carving.

SET XI

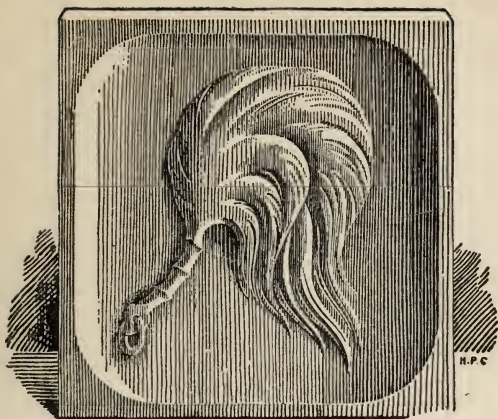
IN Lessons 3, 4, and 5 of this Set, the value of expression in purely decorative work is admirably set forth. We may learn from them how the beauty of conventional design may be largely augmented by the spirit infused into it. Vapour, water and fire have each their own characteristics over and above the mere forms with which we associate them. That it is possible to express in form even such abstract ideas as softness, strength, and vigour is here admirably proved. Indeed, it is one of the greatest charms of these lessons that not only do they teach us much of pure technical value, but they enable us to see that beyond this there is a quality of pure art that ennobles the work performed. In these simple studies it may be that we get but occasional glimpses of this high quality; but if we turn to the great work of the Japanese craftsmen we can more fully realise the perfection to which that quality has attained in their hands.

We have no illustrations for the sixth series, completing the second year of instruction, as we are informed that no "set" studies are given at that period of education. The lessons given by the Japanese master to his students after they have passed through the course here illustrated are more in the nature of completing objects, such as *Ramma*,

JAPANESE WOOD-CARVING

or the open-work panels used as a sort of frieze round Japanese rooms.

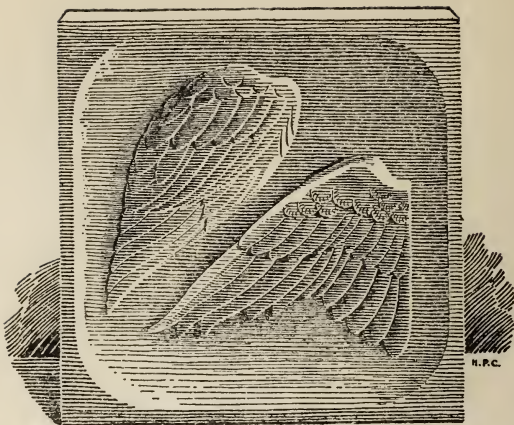
It is considered that the student who has passed through this course of lessons is sufficiently trained to permit him to undertake more practical work. He has been led step by step from the simplest possible lines through freehand, to the delineation of natural forms of both vegetable and animal character. There is, of course, work of a much more advanced nature still to master, but if he has been thoroughly grounded in the lessons already given, he should now be in a position to take an independent course. He has, as it were, been shown the way; and it is well, perhaps, that he should now cast aside the leading-strings and become self-reliant.



SET XI

LESSON I

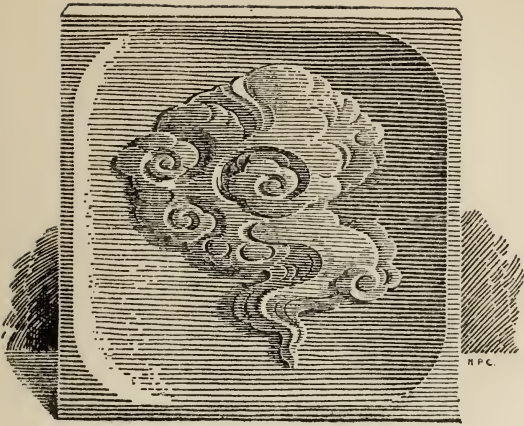
Hossu.—A brush of long white hair, frequently carried by Buddhist priests.



SET XI

LESSON 2

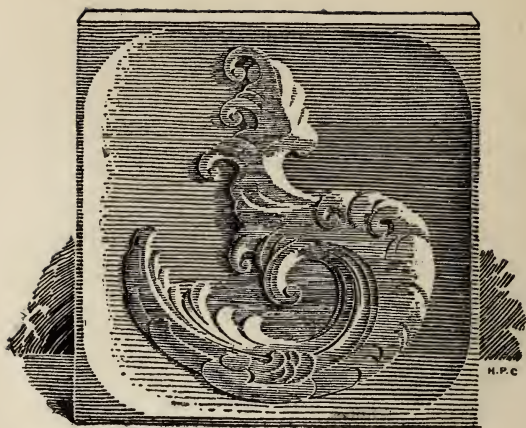
HANE.—Feathers. The ground is sunk $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in the centre, permitting the feathers to be cut on varying planes.



SET XI

LESSON 3

KUMO.—Cloud form. A high-relief study of conventional character. Very softened edges.



SET XI

LESSON 4

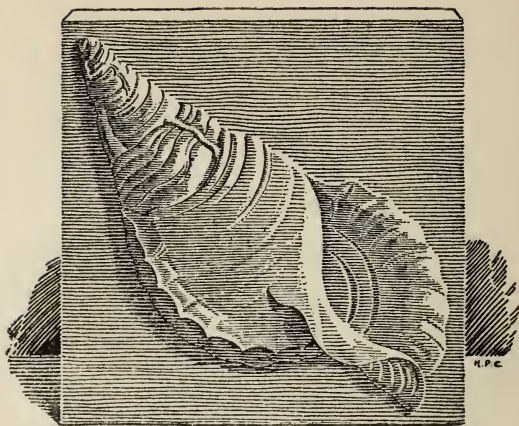
MIZU.—Water form. A conventional rendering of the cresting of a wave. Boldly treated.



SET XI

LESSON 5

HI.—Flame form. A remarkably crisp and vigorous treatment in characteristic Japanese convention.

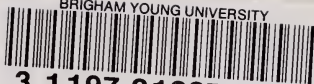


SET XI

LESSON 6

HORA. — A conch-shell. Carved in high-relief, the ground being cut away nearly half an inch.

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